

February 21st 2023

Testimony of Rabbi Ari Weisenfeld, Director of the Connecticut Office of Agudath Israel of America, in support of HB 05424 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TAX CREDIT FOR EDUCATIONAL ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP DONATIONS.

My name is Ari Weisenfeld and I serve as the Director of the Connecticut Office of Agudath Israel of America. Agudath Israel is a national organization that advocates on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish community.

A scholarship tax credit program will benefit low-income children looking for a better education and a brighter future. Similar programs in Florida, Pennsylvania, Georgia and Arizona, have met with enthusiastic participation, bipartisan support, and most importantly, more options for struggling parents.

This program supports two of the highest ideals in Judaism: education and charity. One of the keys to educational excellence is parental involvement. There is no better way to encourage such involvement, and to ensure educational accountability, than to develop policies that help parents choose the school that is best for their children, whether public or non-public, secular or sectarian. However, with the current economic uncertainties, existing scholarship organizations have seen a dramatic increase in requests while experiencing a decrease in donations, leaving many students on waiting lists. Tax credits will spur the philanthropic spirit of Connecticut taxpayers and corporations and help parents fund an appropriate education for their children.

Tax credits encourage increased charitable giving, despite this difficult economic period. In conversations with Jewish business owners, community leaders, and taxpayers, we have heard overwhelming support for such a program. Our community looks forward to contributing to the education of Connecticut's children. Scholarship programs also can help stabilize neighborhoods

and provide an incentive for families to remain in their communities, rather than “buying” a better education by moving elsewhere. This, in turn, increases the tax base and helps support public schools. There is no wiser investment the state of Connecticut can make, than an investment in the education of its youth. Agudath Israel respectfully encourages you to support HB 05424 and a scholarship tax credit program.

If I can be of any help, I am available at your convenience.

All the best,

Ari Weisenfeld

Director Connecticut Office

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